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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Somaliland Stalemate Continues as Riyale Shuffles Cabinet

REF: Nairobi 1709

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Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) On August 15, Somaliland President Riyale reshuffled his Cabinet to remove two outspoken opposition ministers and attempt to gain favor with the clan of leading opposition candidate Silanyo. The National Electoral Commission and President Riyale continue to ignore parliamentary, opposition party, and civil society demands that presidential elections must only be held with a voter registration list. The two opposition parties have called for demonstrations on August 20 as the political stalemate continues. Stakeholders are digging in as pressure mounts from inside and outside Somaliland to address a way forward. International community representatives in Nairobi will release a joint donor statement on August 18. End Summary.

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Riyale Changes Cabinet to Gain Support:  
Calculation May Misfire  
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¶2. (SBU) On August 15, Somaliland President Riyale reshuffled his Cabinet, replacing the ministers of Defense and Industry who were both outspoken critics of the Somaliland President and appointing a Minister of the Presidency. Saleban Warsame Guled replaced Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim as Somaliland's Minister of Defense and the new Minister of Industry is Ahmed Ali "Ubahle", having replaced Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed. Riyale appointed Hassan Ahmed "Ma'alin," reportedly as a reward for his public support for Riyale's decision to proceed with the presidential election without the voter list. (Note: Ahmed was serving as acting Minister of the Presidency after the death of the former minister in July 2009).

¶3. (SBU) All of the incoming and outgoing ministers were from the same Isaak/Haber Jeclo subclan as Kulmiye opposition leader Mohamed Silanyo, but the newly appointed ministers are expected to take a softer line towards President Riyale. Other changes include the dismissal of former State Minister of Water and Minerals Jama Abdilahi "Haibe" who was replaced by Muse Abdi and Farhan Jama who was appointed as State Minister of Interior. All of our contacts told us these changes have added fuel to the fire of a potentially explosive situation. Though the changes are designed to strengthen Riyale's standing and draw support away from Silanyo's Kulmiye party, Somaliland experts told us the President's politicization of his cabinet is having the opposite effect. We have learned that in recent weeks, many influential supporters of Riyale's UDUB party have migrated to the opposition parties.

14. (SBU) The cabinet reshuffle comes less than six weeks before the scheduled presidential election on September 27, which President Riyale insists will happen on time. The two opposition parties reportedly formalized an agreement to boycott elections without the voter registration list. President Riyale and Somaliland Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdilahi Mohamed Duale have publicly defended the decision to proceed with elections using the "traditional" method and criticized the international community's pressure on Somaliland. National Electoral Commission (NEC) Chairman Jama Mohamoud Omar told us that the NEC is in the process of preparing for elections on September 27, though it remains open to dialogue with all political parties.

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Internal Pressure Mounting  
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15. (SBU) After the August 11 parliamentary decision that declared the NEC's decision illegal, the Parliament intended to convene on August 15 to discuss next steps. In response, President Riyale placed police officers in and around the Parliament building in a clear attempt at intimidation. This action and the administration's insistence on moving forward despite Parliament's ruling has reportedly turned the loyalist Guurti (Parliament's upper house of elders) against Riyale. Somaliland experts told us emissaries for Riyale have already started floating another extension of his term in office as a "necessity" if elections cannot take place on September 27. We were told these emissaries were rejected by all stakeholders they approached. Our interlocutors told us the Guurti would likely vote against any bid to extend Riyale's term, and many

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are already talking about what shape a caretaker government could take.

16. (SBU) The two opposition parties have publicly announced a mass protest to take place on August 18. The protest has since slipped to August 20 in order to allow the organizers additional time to coordinate efforts. In response to the opposition party announcement, the Minister of Interior announced in a radio interview on August 16 that all public demonstrations are outlawed, and any protest would be a threat to security.

17. (SBU) We have continued our outreach to Somaliland diaspora communities, particularly to businessmen with significant investments in the region. There will be a meeting of all Dubai-based Somalilanders on August 17 to address the crisis. One businessman, a close associate of Riyale and member of his Gadabursi clan, has been particularly active in his messages to fellow clan leaders. He told us that he underscored to Riyale and the presidency, as well as to Minister of Finance Duale (one of Riyale's closest advisors), the immediate need for Riyale to back down from his position, seek compromise with the other parties, and engage with the international community (especially the U.S. The businessman told us he had spoken with all of the clan emirs who have reportedly insisted that Riyale immediately change his behavior or risk losing clan support. Our contact further told us that we should expect to see a clear shift in Riyale's position over the next two to three days, as pressure from all sides will give him no other choice.

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International Community Remains  
In Lockstep on Political Crisis  
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18. (SBU) On August 17, the Nairobi-based Somaliland Democratization Group met to exchange information and develop a common way forward on the political crisis. We agreed that the cancellation of the EU mission scheduled for August 12-13 prevented President Riyale from using its presence for his own ends. On August 16, UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs David Miliband sent a letter to President Riyale expressing disappointment with his disregard for the voter registration list and terming subsequent developments a threat to Somaliland's peace and stability. On

August 18, a high-level Ethiopian delegation, to be led by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu, is planning to visit Hargeisa to discuss the ongoing electoral problems. At the August 17 meeting, we confirmed that our contacts in Addis told us the Ethiopian administration shared the same position as the donor group.

19. (SBU) The joint donor committee agreed on language for a joint public statement that will be released on August 18. The uncleared, draft statement reads:

The Democratization Steering Committee notes with profound concern the deterioration of the political debate and an increasing dangerous polarization amongst all stakeholders in the Somaliland democratization process.

Somaliland's strength has been in its ability to resolve disputes through consensus and dialogue. The current climate is a departure from this tradition which could undermine peace and stability. We encourage all Somalilanders to come together to find a common way forward to hold free and fair elections.

With a mutually acceptable solution reached by the stakeholders, the donors look forward to continuing their support of Somaliland's democratization process.

RANNEBERGER